

Building Bricks Without Straw

VAUGHN J. FEATHERSTONE

The Kind of People We Are

In the Second World War, just prior to the United States' involvement in it, Hitler had conquered—or at least the German armies had conquered—Belgium and France, and most of the European nations had fallen. The night skies were filled with bombers over Great Britain. From Scotland on down to London, the bombs were dropped constantly. Britain had staggered to its knees, and I suppose they thought surrender was imminent—at least Hitler did. He announced it would be just a matter of days or hours before Great Britain would surrender. The next day Winston Churchill went on radio and said, “What kind of people do they think we are?”

I'd like to ask that question about the Church members and then respond to you as I lead into what I have to say to you tonight. I have a very good friend, and his granddaughter had leukemia. She was only four. The Sunday before she died on Thursday, they were in sacrament meeting together, and this little girl was sitting by her mother. As they passed the bread and water, this

little girl looked up at her mother and said, “Mom, is there a Heavenly Mother?”

Her mother said, “Of course, why?”

“Well, I wish Heavenly Father would put Heavenly Mother in charge of the sacrament, and then instead of bread and water we would have little cookies and milk.”

Up in Canada Sterling Spafford's granddaughter was on a bus. (I believe it was up in Canada. He is the mission president up there.) A man right across the aisle from his granddaughter was smoking up a storm. His little granddaughter crossed the aisle and sat by him. Then she looked up at him sternly and said, “You shouldn't smoke.”

He pulled the cigarette out of his mouth and said, “Says who?”

She said, “Well, Smokey the Bear and Holy the Ghost.”

In President Daines's stake down here we have a man by the name of David Seamons, and his wife, Ann, is on the Young Women general board. Some woebegone, ill-thinking soul last Christmas subscribed to *Playboy* magazine for this

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wonderful family. It came in January, and they were offended. As I understand the story, Brother Seamons called up the circulation department and told them they were members of the Church and didn't appreciate the subscription and that they would like to know who subscribed for them. The subscription department wouldn't tell them who it was. Then Brother Seamons told them, "Don't send us anymore. We don't want your magazine. We refuse to accept it."

Well, the next month the second copy came. Chris Seamons, their eight-year-old boy, took things into his own hands. He wrote a letter to *Playboy*, and these are the exact words: "*Playboy*, I think the magazine you sent us was quite uncalled for. I think your magazine is quite perverted. If you send us another one, I personally will take action." You just have to admire a kid like that. The best part is that on the back of the envelope he put, "Please send back my stamp."

I supervised the Southeast Area until August 15. I am indebted to a friend in the South for this verse, and I thought a lot of the sweet sisters here today might appreciate this.

*At sweet sixteen I first began
To ask the good Lord for a man.
At seventeen, I recall,
I wanted someone strong and tall.*

*At Christmas I reached eighteen,
I fancied someone blond and lean.
And then at nineteen I was sure
I'd fall for someone more mature.*

*At twenty I thought I'd find
Romance with someone with a mind.
I retrogressed at twenty-one
And found college boys more fun.*

*My viewpoint changed at twenty-two
When one man only was my cue.
He broke my heart at twenty-three,
So I begged for someone kind to me.*

*Then begged when I was twenty-four
For anyone who wouldn't bore.
Now Lord, that I am twenty-five,
Just send me someone who's alive.*

As I get into what I'd like to discuss tonight, I'd like to first confess my weaknesses in front of this congregation. My schooling is limited. I love the Lord with all my heart. I suppose we all walk through life and make some serious mistakes, but I know the sacred responsibility that I have tonight.

How We Build Our Bricks

You remember in the days of Moses that he went before Pharaoh. He took Aaron with him and demanded in the name of the Lord God Jehovah that Pharaoh let his people go. Pharaoh refused. He would not let them go—in fact, he disciplined them by taking away the straw from the bricks they were making. The tally of bricks remained the same, but the people had to go out into the fields and cut the stubble of what was left of the straw and try to mix it in.

As all of you know, straw is put into bricks and other kinds of mortar or similar materials to cause an adhesiveness to take place. Today I would like to use building bricks without straw as my theme. We live in a generation when many of our young people attempt to build bricks without straw. In Moses' day straw was essential in making bricks that would not crumble and crack when a little bit of pressure was applied. We live in an unusual time and there is pressure being applied.

I would like to remind you of something regarding David. You remember this wonderful, young David who went into the field of battle, and his brothers taunted him for the naughtiness of his heart for not tending the sheep. David said, "Is there not a cause?" (1 Samuel 17:29). Then, as conditions developed, he found out about the giant of Gath, Goliath, and the challenge being made. This young lad, David, probably the youngest in the entire camp of all Israel, said, "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?" (1 Samuel 17:26).

Well, you know the rest of the story. I don't know if all of you have ever seen a slingshot. Actually, it is a piece of leather about sixty inches long that has a pocket at one end—one end is looped around your finger, the other end is loose so you can let go of it. When you think about it, really, Goliath didn't have a chance. You can imagine what David did all day long. There could not

be anything more boring than tending sheep. He probably found a pile of rocks to sit on and then shot at every knothole, every leaf, any object. He became quite expert.

As David came down off the mountain, Goliath said, “Am I a dog, that thou comest to me with staves?” (1 Samuel 17:43). And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. Then David, who was but a youth of fair countenance, responded in words that cause the soul to thrill:

Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied.

This day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee; and I will give the carcasses of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. [1 Samuel 17:45–46]

I suppose Goliath had never been spoken to like that in his life. I imagine he was wrought with anger and began to lumber (I don’t think he could run) toward David, and David came full tilt down off the mountain. The scriptures say, “David hasted, and ran toward the army to meet the Philistine” (1 Samuel 17:48). Well, the battle was short.

David continued to walk in the ways of God and, as Samuel the prophet had so anointed him, one day he became the king of Israel. We must always be careful when we walk in high places or have special privileges, because there are some things that make it difficult to maintain purity. I am talking of high places out in the world. We can suffer serious consequences if we are not careful.

François René de Chateaubriand said, “In days of service all things are founded, in days of special privilege they deteriorate, and in days of vanity they are destroyed.” There may have been several weaknesses that crept silently into David’s life as a king, a conqueror, with many wives and concubines. In 2 Samuel, chapter 11, verse one, we find an interesting quote. In a time when “kings go forth to battle” David stayed home and “sent Joab.” If he had understood the French phrase

noblesse oblige—my position demands it of me (a free translation)—he would have gone to battle and may have saved himself. He had little to do and his energies were not used to the limit.

And it came to pass in an evening tide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king’s house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon.

And David sent and enquired after the woman. And one said, Is not this Bath-sheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite? [2 Samuel 11:2–3]

It sounds as if even the servant was trying to warn David to leave this woman alone, that she had a husband—Uriah. The king in his authority overrode the servant and sent for Bathsheba. What a different story it would have been if he had gone down and run around the palace a dozen times, had done a hundred pushups, or had gone in unto one of his wives or concubines.

In verse four, a very devious thing happened. It is only one simple sentence, “And she came in unto him, and he lay with her.” In verse five we begin to understand the consequences, “And the woman conceived, and sent and told David, and said, I am with child.”

David was being entangled into deeper, more far-reaching transgression. And it seems without repentance that is always the case. It is like quicksand that carefully drags us down to death.

Without going into great detail, David sent for Uriah, who was with the armies that David should have been leading. If Uriah returned home, thought David, and slept with his wife, he would assume the child was his and the sin would still be covered. David had Uriah report, and then he sent food and drink to Uriah’s home. But Uriah, knowing brave men were dying on the field of battle, could not indulge himself in desires of the flesh. He must have been quite a man of honor. This frustrated David’s plan all the more, and finally, David’s goodness and character had deteriorated so far that he had Uriah deliver a sealed message to Joab. “Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten, and die” (2 Samuel 11:15). Could

this be the same David who had a heart like unto God’s own heart? Joab must have wondered. Obediently he “assigned Uriah unto a place where he knew that valiant men were” (2 Samuel 11:16), and Uriah was killed.

What a tragic consequence sin brings. Think for a moment with me of the temptations thrust before David. He must have found Bathsheba exciting, beautiful, and desirable. His physical arousal took over the reason of his mind and the whisperings of the Spirit. President McKay said that no act is ever committed except it is first justified in the mind. David lusted, desired, and fulfilled the pleasures he had imagined. There is pleasure, excitement, and even satisfaction in sinning. If this were not so, who would sin? But there is also a consequence and a day of accountability for transgressing. Think for a moment of all the lusting and physical pleasure that Satan laid before David, and it was probably all fulfilled. Then cometh another day and another time, a look back in retrospect, and a day of settlement. Satan never gives us even the tiniest thought of the consequences of the transgression or the harvest of the sinner.

Listen to David’s words from Psalm 38 if you want to have an idea of what repentance really is. I never understood it like I have since knowing David’s heart when he was ready to repent.

For thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore.

There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin.

For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me.

My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness.

I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long.

For my loins are filled with a loathsome disease: and there is no soundness in my flesh.

I am feeble and sore broken: I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart.

Lord, all my desire is before thee; and my groaning is not hid from thee.

My heart panteth, my strength faileth me: as for the light of mine eyes, it also is gone from me.

My lovers and my friends stand aloof from my sore; and my kinsmen stand afar off. . . .

But I, as a deaf man, heard not; and I was as a dumb man that openeth not his mouth. . . .

For I am ready to halt, and my sorrow is continually before me.

For I will declare mine iniquity; I will be sorry for my sin. [Psalms 38:2–11, 13, 17–18]

David’s heart had returned. Oh, what a blessing it would have been to David if only he had known in the beginning what he knew in the end.

What a contrast to Job’s life. Satan, who was jealous of Job, said to the Lord:

Doth Job fear God for nought?

Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. [Job 1:9–10]

A great truth is taught here. The Lord hath made a hedge about each one of us and our homes and all that we have on every side. The hedge comes from keeping the commandments and walking in God’s path.

The Role God Would Have Us Fill

When the mantle rests upon priesthood leaders, they are different than they were before. I am a different man now. I know the feeling. I felt it when I had the mantle of the North America Southeast Area, and I have had overpowering impressions since I have been the president of the Utah South Area. Imagine being president where there are four temples of the Church involved (Jordan River, Manti, St. George, and Provo), along with the Utah State Prison, 225 stakes, and BYU.

I can’t tell you the excitement I feel. I am wonderfully proud of BYU, as I know you are here tonight. BYU is supported by the tithing funds of the Church, and we do not accept any kind of government aid at this institution. With rare exception, our administrators, professors, and staff are among the best in their fields. This is

especially true of President Holland and his wife. What a wonderful time to come to BYU. This great man with the heart of a boy, this very wise Yale graduate, with all the things that matter, is as pure and spiritually in tune as anyone I know. No other university can make such claims. That is, we have a prophet and the twelve apostles on the board of directors of the Church Educational System. Our law school is moving up in prominence, and although not yet generally recognized, it is one of the very few best in the nation. Our department of religion is without parallel. We must understand that this is where the strength of BYU rests. It is the religious training and instruction taking place in your lives that will prepare you, and those who follow, for your foreordained roles. Some will be called in the future to serve in the Council of the Twelve and the First Presidency. Others will be called as mission presidents, stake presidents, and bishops. The sisters will be called into general presidencies, general boards, and walk with their husbands in high places in their priesthood roles. BYU must prepare a generation to walk into the period of the millennial reign of the Master.

We have professors who know, who understand, practice, and teach the true and only gospel of Jesus Christ. The BYU department of religion will be kept pure. The classes will be taught by men and women who revere the prophet of God, whose teachings are doctrinally pure, who understand all of the standard works, who practice what they preach, and who have a special knowledge of what God would have them do for the university students. We must fulfill the role God would have us fill—that of preparing men and women to lead the kingdom, who will preside over it in purity, with doctrinal soundness, and with great charity and meekness. As Moses had Jethro, so we have BYU to prepare and counsel you for your future destiny.

I would like every member of every elders quorum and Relief Society presidency, high council, and stake presidency to listen closely. Please make every effort to have every student at BYU, every professor, and every leader attend every devotional at the Marriott Center during the year. They may receive much other education, but I promise you that what they will receive during this one

hour each month will bless their lives for eternity. Feed at the feet of the prophets and apostles and holy men of God.

The athletic program at BYU will be an example to the world and the NCAA of true integrity. We are so proud of this institution. We have men like LaVell Edwards and Ladell Anderson who coach the more dominant athletics, and other men and women in all fields of sports and competition, who are true to the core and still know how to win. To men and women of this caliber, even more important than winning is the fact that this church not be embarrassed by the conduct of the athletes—that discipline, character, and personal integrity be developed and maintained. There are some things more important than winning—and character, integrity, honesty, and loyalty are those virtues.

It has been my dream to someday have BYU invited to play in the Rose Bowl, and that year have New Year's Day be on Sunday. Then our BYU leaders would say to the NCAA, "We will play in the Rose Bowl, but it would have to be on Saturday or Monday." Can you imagine the message that would give to the world?

Priesthood leaders "hear" again. We have a standard for the Lord's university. Contracts have been signed, agreements made and approved. Off-campus housing will be expected to comply. We need to have the priesthood leaders monitor this and help. We need to be more loyal to the Church, to help institute and bring about the practices appropriate for this great school. The administration will do all they can, but I see as the great strength of BYU the priesthood leaders and all those who are serving in different callings.

If we are here and the world is here, and next year they move to a lower standard and we follow behind, we are no better than they are. I think the Lord expects us to stay planted here, and it doesn't matter how far the outside world leads us; we need to stay where we need to be and plant ourselves there. I hope you will become involved in the standards and have more faithfulness and loyalty to your priesthood leaders and to the administration.

Young women of BYU, just a little bit of counsel: Remember what a "good man" is all about. Beware of young men who may lose their tempers

and occasionally slap you around—and there are some. Don't you take it. In his biography of B. H. Roberts, Truman Madsen said, "Men who are fiercest with men are gentlest with women" (*Defender of the Faith: the B. H. Roberts Story* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980], p. 96). That has been my experience. There are some things that are unacceptable conduct. You don't have to be with someone like that. If it is that way before you get married, it will be far worse later on.

Dangerous Thinking

President Stephen Joel Trachtenberg of the University of Hartford delivered a speech in Connecticut on June 3, 1986. And he discussed some things I thought were fairly impressive. He talked about ways in which thinking might be dangerous. He said:

Way Number One, it seems to me, is that thinking—analysis—the habit of probing deeply into things—can lead to depression.

Remember that people who are regarded as not being clever aren't necessarily lacking in brain-power. They just don't make use of the brain-power that they have available. And one of the reasons for that may be that when you inquire carefully into a lot of things that go on in our world, you find that many of them fall short of perfection. . . .

So you can't altogether blame folks who, rather than get upsetting answers, simply don't ask questions! They stay reasonably happy by not doing too much reasoning!

A second risk of academic high achievement is that there are those who will actually hold it against you—in other words, that it can sometimes lead to a lack of popularity where particular individuals are concerned. . . .

The third risk of academic achievement lies, believe it or not, in your relationship to the adult world. I hope it won't come as a tremendous surprise when I tell you that many adults feel quite ambivalent where talented and high-achieving teenagers are concerned. . . .

In other words, a typical fear that adults have is that they are on the way to becoming obsolete. That's why dedicated teachers don't necessarily leap to their feet with enthusiasm when one of their students proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that they just made a mistake. . . .

A fourth risk of academic high achievement, in my opinion, is despair. Once you've set a high standard for yourself, there have to come moments when you ask yourself: "Can I keep this up?" At the age of 13 or 14 or 15, you ask whether you can keep going at this pace until you're really old—until you're 25, say, or 32. Then, when you've been doing it for 30 or 40 years, you wonder whether you can keep going at this pace until retirement. . . .

Finally, there is another risk of academic high achievement that bears some thinking about, which is that it often leads people to transform the world in which they are living, which in turn can cause a good deal of personal upset.

Let's say that you are in your teens or early twenties and you work really hard to develop a brand new concept and a brand new range of intellectual or scientific possibilities. Now the world begins to change because you dreamt up the microchip . . . or genetic engineering . . . or some altogether new way of looking at the human past.

*Yes, there are some risks . . . but they are risks well taken. The benefits are worth the dangers. The eagle flying high always risks being shot at by some hare-brained human with a rifle. But eagles—and young eagles like you—still prefer the view from that risky height to what is available flying with the turkeys far, far below. ["Five Ways in Which Thinking Is Dangerous," Stephen Joel Trachtenberg, *Vital Speeches of the Day* 52, no. 21 (August 15, 1986), pp. 652–53]*

Now, just a word about communism—the great satanic, godless society. We live in a day of disinformation. You will read much and you will hear much. Others will be exposed to myriads of philosophies.

Stuart Clark Rogers gave us this interesting insight when he said:

Tyranny does not always march in the night in hobnail boots. Tyranny today is more likely to jog up to you on a sunny day in a pair of Adidas, and remark pleasantly, "Gosh, old pal, wouldn't it be nice if we could do something for all those people who aren't as clever as we are? Let's protect them from their own foolishness. Let's see to it that they're only exposed to what they really need to know. And let's punish those we think might be able to take advantage of them. ["Freedom Needs

Advertising: Access to Information, Defense of Our Rights," *Vital Speeches of the Day* 51, no. 3 (November 15, 1984), p. 89]

There are two grand keys to discerning disinformation. The first is, "Does it line up with the teachings in the standard works and does it parallel the teachings of the prophets and apostles?" The second is, "Do you feel at peace with the Spirit?" The power of darkness can appear as light. Satan can cause a burning in the bosom. But the two things he can never duplicate are charity (that is, the pure love of Christ), and peace. When peace comes you will know it.

The prophet Heber C. Kimball said,

*We think we are secure here in the chambers of the everlasting hills, where we can close those few doors of the canyons against mobs and persecutors, the wicked and the vile, who have always beset us with violence and robbery, but I want to say to you, my brethren, the time is coming when we will be mixed up in these now peaceful valleys to that extent that it will be difficult to tell the face of a Saint from the face of an enemy to the people of God. Then, brethren, look out for the great sieve, for there will be a great sifting time, and many will fall; for I say unto you there is a test . . . coming, and who will be able to stand? [Orson F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1888), p. 456]*

We live in that day. They are among us. You will hear much from them. And most of what you hear will be disinformation. There will be some who will talk to you about the rights of consenting adults. It may sound reasonable to a young unschooled mind. I think back to how, at election times, I would listen to all the candidates speak, and it all sounded good and right. But over the years I have been able to discern and sift through what I hear. Now I only hear a few voices, and they are the important ones.

Some will find fault with the Brethren. Not in a major way, but in subtle, little ways, just enough to cause you to say, "I wonder if he is really like that." Some will find fault with the Book of Mormon. They may not feel strongly about Joseph Smith.

Would you remember that disinformation will come? Those it will come through will usually be friendly people and more subtle than you would ever suppose.

Avoid Staring into the Abyss

Elder Maxwell said, "Burnout comes from staring into the abyss of abnormality too long." That is why those who are involved in sin and perversion have a spiritual burnout. They stare into the abyss of abnormality.

A woman visited my office not too long ago. She found out after several years of marriage that her husband was a homosexual. She was sitting at home one night, and as she sat there talking with him, trying to discover what the problem was, the Spirit blessed her with the knowledge and she said, "I know what the problem is. You're gay." He broke into tears and he said he would repent. Those who will sin will lie, and he continued to sin. The marriage is ending in divorce. He has AIDS. He has infected her with AIDS, and she dares not have her children examined.

It about broke my heart. She is young and attractive and wants to have more children, but, as she said to me: "Who would marry a woman who has AIDS? I dare not have more children for fear they would be infected."

I called the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta. I was told by the highest officials of that agency that AIDS does not only come from homosexuality, but also comes from indiscriminate heterosexual relationships or any kind of sexual perversion. Please remember that—*any kind* of sexual perversion. Men most often transmit it to women, but sometimes women transmit it to men. What a tragic thing it would be to make a few mistakes and later suffer these kinds of consequences. Those who get involved in perversions build bricks without straw.

Satan has been reaping a plenteous harvest. It is more than abundant. Now he has turned his attention to the elect of God. It causes the Brethren to grieve, and it about breaks our hearts when we see the fair sons and daughters being drawn away. We need not bend or buckle. All we need to do is keep the commandments of God, follow the Brethren, pray, and read the scriptures daily.

Bond yourselves to the prophets and apostles of God. I have always loved them. I have gone down to conferences on Temple Square and have watched the apostles and prophets over the years, and I have come closer to them. For over twenty years I went to the Tabernacle and sat close to the front so I could look into their faces and see what made them great. I know I would give my life for any one of those Brethren just that quick, and I know everyone of them is worthy of the high place to which he has been called.

This Is What It's All About

I was in Charlotte, North Carolina, attending a zone conference, and Reggie, a young black university student, came to the conference. He had on a new pair of Levi's that still had the four pieces of thread where the price tag had been. He wasn't doing very well financially. He had bought them for the zone conference and had on a white shirt and tie that I think the missionaries loaned him. In a discussion he said to me, "I was taught two or three discussions. After the discussions they invited me to church. When I got to church Satan met me outside the door and he said, 'You can't go in there. That is a white man's church.' Satan tried to play the 'colors' game on me."

That was interesting to me because Reggie said he went inside because he knew that Joseph Smith was a prophet, that the Book of Mormon was true, and that he had found more love and caring than he had known before. He said he felt like a poor beggar who had stumbled upon a field of diamonds and wanted to share with everyone he met.

In the same meeting a nurse said she used to work hard all night. She would go home in the morning to her children—four teenagers. Their hard rock music was terrible. After picking up a six-pack of beer, she would smoke, have her coffee, and go to bed. The house was messy and she could hardly wait to go back to work where she had a little relief.

One morning the missionaries came to the door and awakened her. She listened to them and things began to change. Now she is a member of the Church and doesn't drink or smoke anymore. The family doesn't listen to that kind of music anymore, and their house is clean. They have

family home evening and family prayer, and they all go to church together. That is what it is all about. I think that is when we make bricks with straw in them.

A couple of years ago, in Texas, a young man drove his motorcycle across the Mexican border. He was going up and down the sand dunes. There was a dune with about a twenty-foot drop, and he went sailing off into space. In the accident the top part of the skull was crushed and almost torn from his head, leaving his brain exposed. It was thirteen hours before help came to him. A helicopter took him to a Houston hospital, and the doctors said he could never live. If the accident didn't kill him, the exposure and infection would.

They notified the family. He had a younger sister, twenty-five, who was married and had a four-year-old son. This little guy loved his Uncle Dennis. He thought the sun came up, went around his Uncle Dennis, went back down, and that was the day. He thought he was terrific. Uncle Dennis had taken time to take him for rides and play with him and do all the things that are done.

When the child heard about the accident, that his Uncle Dennis wasn't going to live, he said, "Mom, can we have a prayer?" She answered that they were going to their grandmother's house and the whole family was fasting and going to have a prayer. He said, "I mean, can you and I have a prayer?"

She said, "Well, I guess so. Sure." They went into the bedroom and she was, about to say the prayer when he asked, "Mom, can I say the prayer?" She told him to go ahead. He said this prayer: "Heavenly Father, Uncle Dennis has been in a terrible accident, and no one expects him to live. But he is my favorite uncle, and I love him. Please don't let him die. Let him live. Okay? In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen."

Well, his mother was really concerned. It sounded like her brother was going to die, so she tried to prepare her son by saying, "Son, if your Uncle Dennis dies, you have to have faith and understand what that is all about."

He replied, "Mom, Uncle Dennis is going to live."

"Well, we hope he does, but if he dies you must not lose faith in prayer or in the Lord."

“Uncle Dennis is going to live.” She didn’t know what else to say. She went into the kitchen and he followed her in. She was still trying to reason with him when he said, “Mom, do you know that Heavenly Father has a deep, soft, quiet voice?”

She asked, “How do you know that?”

He said, “Because when I said, ‘Heavenly Father, he’s my favorite uncle. Let him live. Okay?’ he said, ‘Okay.’”

Uncle Dennis walked into my office not too long ago. I could see where they had sewn him back together. He had a cane in one hand and walked with a slight limp, but his mind was good, and he is going to the University of Utah. He plays golf and the piano. No one would have known that except for the faith of a young man. That is the kind of people we are. We build bricks with that kind of straw.

“I Couldn’t Do that to Your Mother”

Let me conclude with this. About a year ago my mother went to the hospital. When I was thirteen my mother and father were divorced, and it was a rough life. I saw her put on heavy men’s work boots and go to Garfield’s Smelter at eleven o’clock at night and work until seven in the morning so she could be there when the seven children were home. When she came home, she would get us up and send us off to school. When we came home for lunch, she would be up washing, baking bread, or something. When we came home after school, she would be up. I don’t know when the poor woman slept.

One time at school the teacher pulled us into a room, and the nurse was there. The nurse methodically went through each person’s hair in the family. We were naive and didn’t know what she was doing and went home and told mother about it. She knew. She put on I think the only dress she had in this world and marched down to Hawthorne School. She went into the principal’s office and said, “We may be poor, but we’re not dirty, and don’t you ever search my children for lice again.”

I can’t tell you how embarrassed I was when I learned that was what the nurse was doing. Over the years I have watched this great mom work those kinds of hours. She had a heart condition,

and we thought she ought to go and have an examination to see if open-heart surgery ought to take place. They were just wheeling her out of the room when as calm and peacefully as she ought to go, she passed away just that quick. The doctor said it was one in ten thousand times that something like that would happen.

Well, that was on Thursday night. On Friday I was supposed to go to Lakeland, Florida. I didn’t tell the Brethren about my mother’s passing. I’m sure they would have excused me from the assignment, but I felt I had better go. We were planning the funeral service, and as I got ready to leave, I was hoping the family would invite me to speak. I didn’t dare volunteer, but I wanted to say some things about my mom. Just before I left my older brother asked if I would feel all right about being the final speaker at the funeral. I said that I would love to.

Then I got on the plane and flew to Lakeland. I didn’t tell anyone at the conference that my mother had passed away. I was a little tender anyway, and I didn’t want them to know. I made it through the first day, and that night after the meetings the mission president came to me and said, “We’ve got a real problem. We have a missionary that you have to decide whether he stays in the mission field or goes home.”

I interviewed him very thoroughly. He had been involved in some really serious problems, almost breaking up a marriage. He had not committed fornication, but he was far more seriously involved than any missionary ought to be. But he didn’t have a repentant attitude. I wanted him to stay in the mission field so badly I couldn’t stand it. But I thought he had to have at least a little spirit of repentance. I pled inwardly that he would show me that he wanted to stay. He did want to stay and he would say he wouldn’t do it anymore, but he never once said he was sorry.

Well, I felt really bad about it, and finally, at the end of the interview, I thought I had better send him home. Then I was impressed and said, “Tell me about your dad.”

He said, “Oh, my dad is inactive in the Church. My dad couldn’t care less if I’m out in the mission field. In fact, he would like me to come home and would be grateful if I would come home.”

I said, “Tell me about your mom.”

Then he got a little tender and said, “She is the president of the stake Young Women.”

I said to him, “I’m going to let you stay. You don’t really deserve to stay, but I couldn’t do that to your mother. I couldn’t have that happen to this woman who takes your letters around and reads them to the young women in the stake. Maybe you’re the only great thing in her life. She probably shares your letters from one ward to the next and is so proud of you. I couldn’t have her stand at the bottom of the stairs of the plane and watch you walk off dishonorably discharged from your mission. I’m going to let you stay.”

He said, “Thanks. I appreciate it.” Then he walked out.

The next day, during the last ten minutes of conference, I said, “I apologize if I have been just a little bit tender this morning, last night, and yesterday. My mother passed away and the funeral is tomorrow. She raised seven boys and girls alone without any alimony or child support.” I explained a little bit about her life and bore my testimony.

After the meeting was over this young man came up to the stand. Tears were running down his cheeks, and he ran up to me, put his arms around me, and said, “President Featherstone, now I know why you are letting me stay. It isn’t only because of my mom. It is because of your mom.” I answered that I guessed it was.

This woman who only took care of us, raised seven children, I guess was insignificant and not important to everyone else. The only thing

she did in the Church was serve as secretary for the Sunday School and Relief Society. She had a temple recommend and went to the temple. We loved, adored, and honored her. At the morning viewing I was standing by the casket, and to this insignificant woman’s viewing came President Ezra Taft Benson, President Monson, Elder Haight, Elder Maxwell, and about a dozen of the other Brethren. Many of the others wrote to me. I think if my mother was there it would have humbled her heart to think that those kind of men would come and pay her tribute.

She taught us in our family that you build bricks with straw—integrity, character, morality. These things are important. I thank God for her great life. May you be blessed. May you understand that I know with everything in my heart and soul that this Church is the Lord’s church. I love it. I promise you that if you will abide by its precepts and commandments, you will build straw into the bricks of your life. I testify to you that I know President Benson is a prophet of God. I love him with all my heart. Oh, what a great, exciting president he is! What a wonderful time to live! This man understands world political figures and situations like no one else in the Church living in this time. What a privilege it is for you to walk in his day. What a privilege it is to know that we’re coming down to the wrapping-up scenes, and the Lord is preparing you here at this time in your lives for all that you’ll do ahead. May God bless you. I love you and call down blessings to be upon you and this great BYU. I love it and am terribly proud of it, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.